

CHAPTER I

COMMUNITY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Introduction

The purpose of the Master Plan is to provide the community with a statement of public policy regarding how the Town of Abington plans to manage and guide future growth and development in the community; how it plans to address its needs for business and commerce; and, how it plans to improve the overall quality of life of its residents. The goals, policies and strategies outlined here are intended to inform residents, public and non-profit agencies, developers and members of the business community of the Town's position on land use related issues that will provide guidance for decision-making. The programs and recommendations contained here specify a set of actions that the Town will undertake to achieve the goals and policies of the Master Plan.

Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 41, Sub-Section 81D, require local Planning Boards to prepare a Master Plan or what may also be referred to as a Comprehensive Plan or Comprehensive Master Plan. The Master Plan is a document that consists of text, maps, and illustrations that serves as the basis for decision-making regarding the long-term physical development of a community. The Master Plan document must be internally consistent between its policies, forecasts and standards and consists of nine required elements. The nine required elements are described below.

Community Goals and Policies Statement

The Community Goals and Policies Element identifies the goals and policies of the Town for guiding future growth and development. Through the planning process, the Planning Board conducts a public process that strives to incorporate community values, goals and policies, and to identify patterns of development that are consistent with these goals.

Land Use Element

The Land Use Element identifies present land use patterns and proposes the future distribution, density, location and inter-relationship of public and private land uses. This element shall relate the proposed standards of population density and building intensity to the capacity of the land and the existing/planned facilities and services, and shall base the proposed future pattern on the compatibility or incompatibility of various uses.

Housing Element

The Housing Element identifies and analyzes existing and forecasted housing needs and objectives including programs for the preservation, improvement and development of housing. This element shall identify policies and strategies to provide a balance of local housing opportunities for all citizens.

Economic Base

The Economic Base Element identifies policies and strategies for the expansion, strengthening and/or stabilization of the local economic base and the promotion of employment opportunities.

Transportation Element

The Transportation Element is an inventory and assessment of the existing transportation network and circulation system; and makes recommendations for maintaining and improving the transportation system.

Open Space and Recreation

The Open Space and Recreation Element provides an inventory of the conservation and open space resources and recreational areas of the Town, and policies and strategies for the management, acquisition, protection and conservation of these resources and areas.

Historic and Cultural Resources

The Historic and Cultural Resources Element provides an inventory of the significant historic and cultural resources of the community and presents policies and strategies for the management and development of these resources.

Community Facilities

The Community Facilities Element identifies and assesses the existing physical facilities of the town and the suitability of these facilities to meet the needs of the community in the future. Examples of these include town administration, police, fire, schools and library.

Implementation Program

The Implementation Program Element identifies and schedules the actions needed to achieve the plan's objectives. This element usually makes recommendations for amending the Town's development regulations to be consistent with the Master Plan. These would include the scheduled expansion or replacement of public facilities or transportation system components and the anticipated resulting costs and revenues.

Abington Overall Goal for Development

To manage and guide development in the Town of Abington so that new development will have a positive impact on the tax base; preserve and protect the town's character and amenities; accommodate needed housing and employment

opportunities; provide for commercial and business growth; and, meet other community development needs.

Land Use

To provide for balanced community development that will preserve the town's character and amenities while providing opportunities for residential, commercial, and industrial development.

This land use goal was stated in the 1999 Master Plan and the Town of Abington has done a great deal toward its accomplishment. In 2003 the Planning Board totally reworked the Town's Zoning By-Law to accomplish recommendations made in the Master Plan for land use changes that further this land use goal

In addition, these zoning changes supported the housing and economic development objectives of the Town; expanded housing opportunities and led to job creation, job retention and increased tax revenues. The Town also used for the first time the Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP) that enabled Target Corporation to decide to construct a 125,000 square foot department store in Abington that employs over 150 persons. Through the EDIP program the Town is able to offer tax incentives to prospective new firms and employers who locate in the community and create new jobs.

Important changes were also made to the Zoning By-laws. These encourage more intensive development of the North Abington and Abington Central Business Districts that lend them to being renewed as a traditional small town centers.

Other significant land use changes were: the establishment of the Transit Oriented Development District (TOD) and the Technology Business Zoning District (TB). The TOD district was established to encourage the development of land uses that complement the existing commuter rail line and the established residential areas surrounding the Abington commuter rail station. The TB district was established to encourage the development of computer technology, internet business, and other technology related businesses.

Housing Goals

Develop an increased ability to review and oversee Chapter 40B Comprehensive Permit projects:

1. The Town of Abington is within 75 units of meeting its requirements under Chapter 40B in providing at least 10 percent of its housing inventory as affordable units. Presently, the Town of Abington is at 8.6 percent. Efforts will be made for the Town to reach the 10 percent level over the next five years.
2. The Town needs to designate an individual and/or entity as the responsible party for monitoring and enforcing Comprehensive Permit requirements for Chapter 40B projects beyond the Zoning Board of Appeals.

3. There is a need for oversight and monitoring of the regulatory agreements for Chapter 40B projects by the Town. Chapter 40B projects must be kept in compliance with the terms and conditions of their approval and maintained as part of the town's inventory of affordable housing.
4. The town needs to develop clear understanding or criteria of what it expects to be negotiated with a developer regarding the regulatory agreement for Chapter 40B projects. These criteria should include density, type of units (e.g., single-family, multi-family, attached, detached), senior vs. family vs. disabled housing, ownership vs. rental units, percentage of affordable units (30% or 40% vs. 25%), income categories to be served, term limits if any, of affordable units, open space or other amenities and what trade-offs the Town is willing to make
5. The town may want to require that developers work with a non-profit developer with experience in developing affordable housing projects in order to ensure their long-term affordability.

Develop an increased supply of affordable rental housing in Abington and support such efforts elsewhere in the South Shore area

Many Section 8 certificate holders have an extremely difficult time finding housing units that they can afford locally. Concerns have been expressed over how the lack of affordable housing for young people and families is impacting residents in their age 20's and early 30's in finding decent, safe and sanitary housing that is affordable. Recent Zoning By-Law changes should allow the development of accessory apartments and provide for the development of apartment units in the newly created Central Business District Zoning District. This Zoning change should help to mitigate the current deficiency in the supply of affordable rental housing units.

Periodic review of the Town's Development Regulations

A close Planning Board review of the Town's development regulations to see if changes can be made that would facilitate the development of a variety of housing to be constructed in abandoned and/or vacant industrial properties where appropriate. This review should include examining what impact such development might have on adjacent developments and the Town's infrastructure.

Development of Additional Subsidized Senior Housing Units

Addition of approximately forty units of subsidized senior housing by the Abington Housing Authority. Presently, there are too few units available to meet demands and there is a waiting list of over one hundred and ten applicants. The waiting period for an elderly housing unit is approximately two years.

Develop Additional Market Rate Senior Housing Units

More age 55+ housing for young seniors and empty nesters. Many senior citizens who own homes that are too large for their needs may find this type of housing more attractive

than maintaining a large home. Units in an age 55+ developments would be smaller in terms of the size of the housing and the land parcel, and landscaping and exterior building maintenance would be taken care of by a homeowner's association. A mix of owner-occupied and rental units would be desirable. Assisted living facilities are also a possible senior housing option.

Use Town Owned Land for Affordable Housing Development

Consideration should be given to use under-utilized town owned land and other surplus properties for affordable housing development. Town owned property could help support the development of affordable housing that meets the town needs.

Seek to preserve low to moderate cost rental housing units in any potential expiring use project with affordability restrictions.

Economic Development Goals and Objectives

The Town of Abington should continue its efforts to retain and attract business; to maximize local job creation and retention; and, to increase local tax revenues through use of the Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP).

Abington has been designated an Economic Target Area (ETA) by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and therefore has the ability to offer tax incentives to prospective new firms and employers who locate in the community under the Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP). This gives Abington a distinct advantage when competing with other communities who do not have the ability to offer tax incentives to attract businesses.

Additionally, through the planning program, the Town has developed a complete inventory of available commercial and industrial properties in the community. It will continue to use this listing to attract prospective firms and entrepreneurs to the community to utilize vacant and abandoned commercial and industrial space in order to increase tax revenues.

Abington should seek to increase and diversify its commercial tax base of the town by seeking to attract additional retail, office, light manufacturing and warehouse development while retaining existing businesses.

Continued growth in the Town's retail and service sectors can be expected with the increased growth of the area's population and the development of Southfield by the South Shore Tri-Town Development Corporation on the site of the former South Weymouth Naval Air Station. However, the retail and service sectors are volatile and extremely sensitive to local and stiff regional competition. For example, Southfield is expected to add 400,000 square feet of retail space and existing regional shopping centers including South Shore Plaza, the Marketplace in Braintree, Hanover Mall in Hanover, and Independence Mall in Kingston have expanded and upgraded in recent years. But there is

a continuing demand for highway commercial locations along the Route 18 and Route 123 corridors and these have proven to be good locations for certain types of retail and business enterprises.

The retail sector is a source of jobs/and or employment opportunities for individuals entering the job market, interested in a retail sales career, wanting part-time employment and/or supplementing family income. The Wal-Mart and Target Department Stores offer employment opportunity for such individuals. There is also the promise of additional job opportunities as the Lowe's Home Improvement Center nears completion and is opened for business.

Increase efforts to promote the revitalization of the North Abington and Abington Business Districts.

The Abington Planning Board has successfully implemented changes to the Zoning By-law that are designed to enhance the North Abington and Abington Business Districts as viable business centers. This was accomplished by designating these as Central Business District zones that would permit more intense development and support convenience shopping and consumer services in these locations. However, zoning changes alone cannot bring about the revitalization of these established business centers and more must be done to induce businesses to expand in these locations. Tax incentives are certainly one factor that may come into play, but other features such as creating a more pleasant and attractive environment with pedestrian friendly sidewalks, street trees and street furniture can make the areas more attractive to shoppers and consumers. Toward this end, the Town of Abington has applied for a Public Works Economic Development Grant to make the North Abington Business District a more attractive, pedestrian friendly environment. This is recognition that much more can be done to make the town centers pedestrian friendly and to improve traffic safety and improve the business climate. The Town should continue to support its town center business owners so they will be able to continue to contribute to being part of a vibrant commercial center.

Concentrate future commercial development in order to increase convenience, minimize auto trips, provide opportunity for walking and bicycling to destinations, and protect existing neighborhoods from the intrusion of incompatible uses.

Although local tax revenues and employment opportunities generated by new economic growth are desirable, Abington must continue to properly manage development, so that the character of the community is not adversely affected. Abington is a highly desirable community to live in and the town must remain diligent to maintain the quality of life for its residents as well as to serve the needs of the business sector.

The Town has indicated a willingness to work with existing and prospective businesses to expand or increase their business, to overcome impediments, and to enhance local tax revenues.

Transportation Goals and Objectives

To provide for a safe and efficient network of streets and roadways that provides all residents with easy and convenient access to all locations within and outside of the community and to develop and maintain a balanced multi-modal transportation system that assures the efficient and safe movement of people, goods and services.

Encourage MassHighway to widen and improve Route 18 to four lanes from Route 139 south to the Whitman town line in order to accommodate future traffic flows.

Projected increases in traffic volumes on Route 18 and the gradually lowering of the level of service on this important route call for widening and improving Route 18 south of Route 139 from two to four lanes to the Whitman town line and further up-grading the intersection with Route 123.

Encourage MassHighway to improve high hazard intersections along Route 139 and Route 123 in Abington.

Serious circulation problems in Abington involve intersections along Routes 139 and 123 where congestion, poor intersection alignment or the physical configuration of the intersection contribute to vehicular accidents.

Provide a second means of access for vehicles to enter and/or exit from the Town Hall/Library/High School complex to the west in an emergency.

The lack of an alternative means of access could pose a public safety issue if large numbers of people had to rapidly vacate the area in a short space of time. At a minimum provide a bike/pedestrian connection through to Hancock Street.

Monitor changing traffic conditions on major routes due to the development of “Southfield” on the site of the former South Weymouth Naval Air Station.

The Town of Abington has assurance from the South Shore Tri-Town Development Corporation and Lennar Partners/LNR South Shore LLC. (the Southfield Developer), that they will develop a traffic management plan for the construction phase of the project and provide for the development of the East-West Parkway through the former base from Route 18 to Route 3 within Phase I of the development.

Monitor changing public needs and requirements for transportation, including travel demands and patterns that could lead to an expansion of public transportation service to Abington.

The Town of Abington should work with Old Colony Planning Council and the Brockton Area Transit Authority to have these agencies survey the need and feasibility of extending fixed route bus service to additional areas of Abington and possibly portions of Whitman and to develop a cost estimate of providing such service.

Work with Old Colony Planning Council to identify, lay-out and develop bicycle and pedestrian routes that offer safe and secure local travel in Abington for residents.

The Town of Abington has committed to working with the steering committee sponsored by Old Colony Planning Council toward laying out and developing bicycle and pedestrian routes within the town and region.

Continue to support efforts for the State to develop the “Trail to the Sea” pedestrian/bike trail along the abandoned Hanover Branch of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Rail Line.

The “Trail to the Sea” pedestrian/bike path would begin in North Abington Center and follow the abandoned rail right-of-way through Rockland to Hanover.

Open Space and Recreation Goals and Objectives

Preserve, protect and increase the amount of the Town’s Open Space and Green’ Areas and improve access to these holdings.

The Town should move, when appropriate, to acquire the Porhecky Property previously authorized through Town Meeting action as an open space land acquisition.

Make efforts to increase conservation land through acquisition, conversion and conservation restrictions.

Accommodate special needs; improve the accessibility of Abington’s open space; and, achieve compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act goals.

Plan and implement achievable open space preservation and recreation projects.

Plan and layout a nature trail from Ames Nowell State Park through the Beaver Brook conservation land.

Plan and layout bicycle routes in Town to tie into and tie together the Town’s recreational assets.

Increase number and quality of Active Recreational Areas and Facilities

Move to restore and maintain the Wilson Memorial Bridge and Arch in Island Grove Park.

Identify properties within the town suitable for creating new active recreation areas and facilities and to increase the quality of existing facilities.

Accommodate special needs; improve the accessibility of Abington's open space and recreational facilities; achieve compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act goals.

Increase quality of active recreational areas and facilities.

Protect Abington's watershed and water resources

Improve the water quality in Island Grove Pond.

Involve the Public in issues of Watershed and Resource Protection.

Strengthen existing by-laws to further protect watersheds and water resources.

Historic and Cultural Goals and Objectives

To promote and increase public awareness of historically significant sites and structures in the Town of Abington.

A small brochure describing the history of Abington, its historic sites and places of interest would be a valuable asset in marketing the community to residents and visitors. This potential should be explored with the Plymouth County Development Council (PCDC) to determine whether this would be worthwhile to pursue or if the PCDC could assist with achieving other economic development goals.

To work toward the establishment of a historic district(s) as a means of protecting and preserving existing historical structures.

The Abington Historical Commission should develop a specific historic preservation vision for the proposed Historic District(s) to better inform people of what they are hopeful of accomplishing.

To work toward enacting a demolition delay by-law to preserve and protect historic structures from being razed and to maintain our historical character

Explore possible funding opportunities that would enable the preservation and protection of historic structures that are threatened with demolition. Protect historic properties through acquisition or other means such as Town acceptance and approval of the Community Preservation Act or other funding mechanisms.

To encourage the general population of the community to be involved in historical and cultural events.

Undertake a program of community education to promote historic preservation support and annually promote cultural events in the community that add to the cohesiveness and fabric of the community.

Community Facilities Goals and Objectives

To provide for the efficient and effective delivery of local governmental services and programs and to provide adequate facilities to accomplish this goal.

As the population of Abington has grown in number, increased demands have been placed on town government to maintain the current level of service or to provide additional services to serve the growing population need. Fortunately, the Town of Abington made very significant and prudent investments in upgrading or providing new and improved community facilities and has therefore been able to keep abreast most of its present and future needs.

To continue to provide high quality level of education in Abington that provide all students with challenging educational experiences necessary to reach their potential and become informed, responsible citizens.

The most significant community facilities need facing the Town of Abington in the next twenty years is the need to upgrade public school. To a large extent, when and how the Town of Abington can pursue its school building program will rest with decisions of the Massachusetts School Building Authority concerning the amount of assistance that will be available. As of the time of the preparation of the Master Plan Update no clear long term policy on school building projects has been articulated by the Commonwealth. But Abington residents can be assured that public education quality is and will continue to be a priority with the community.

To provide facilities and services to meet the emergency management, police, fire public safety needs of the Town of Abington.

A study to determine to how best serve the long term needs of the fire department has been commissioned. The study will chart the course for accomplishing this important public safety/community facilities objective. The challenge of accomplishing this and other community facility objectives for the Town of Abington in the future will be to manage the limited financial resources available to the town to gain the maximum impact with the funding that is available.